

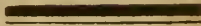
EXTRACT

FROM

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON THE

MORNING OF MAY 31, 1826.



BOSTON,

ISAAC R. BUTTS AND CO.

PRINTERS TO THE AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

1826.

Bx
9843
W37
E9
1826

The Address, a part of which is here published, was delivered before the Conference of Ministers, who annually assemble at the Vestry in Berry Street, Boston, on the morning of election. By vote of the Conference a copy was requested for the press. The introductory remarks are omitted by desire of the author.

EXTRACT

FROM

AN ADDRESS.

AMONG those objects of public interest, which make a special demand upon the ministers of religion, there is one, toward which I wish now to draw your particular attention ; because I think, that at the present moment, it has a peculiar claim upon it. I refer to those great efforts, which are making at the present day, by all sects of christians, and in different parts of the christian world, to communicate the knowledge of christianity, and to extend its blessings to the heathen. What interest ought we to feel, and what part ought we to take, in this great movement ?

As to the object itself, toward which this movement is directed, I think there can be with christians but one feeling. In proportion to our estimate of the value of our holy religion, we must wish to see its blessings extended to all mankind. We must cordially wish success to every effort for this purpose, and must heartily rejoice in all the evidences of success, with which any of them are attended.

But I am far from thinking it a reasonable ground of censure or of surprise, that men of reflection should be slow to engage in any of the enterprises, which are attempted for this purpose. The history of foreign missions is full of lessons of caution, and of distrust. How much of pious and well meant exertion has been wasted in ill-concerted schemes, and ill-conducted attempts to convert the nations of the east to christianity! How many flattering and even splendid accounts of success have proved wholly fallacious, to break down our confidence and destroy our hopes!

But are we therefore to be discouraged from all further attempts, and to abandon the cause as hopeless? In those unsuccessful endeavours, which have heretofore been made, for the conversion of the heathen, may we not discover some causes of failure, which do not appertain to the exertions, which are making for the purpose at the present day, or such as are capable of being avoided in future attempts? Shall we not find these causes, partly in the form, in which christianity has been presented, and partly in the manner in which it has been attempted to be introduced? But let christianity be presented in its pure and simple form, and there is nothing in it unintelligible, incredible, or revolting, that it should be impossible to recommend it to the heathen mind. Nor is it necessary that the heralds of the gospel should lose their labour, as has too often happened, by offering it to those, whom they have taken no care to prepare for its reception by previous instruction and discipline. All this those who are engaged in the great cause are beginning to understand; and in proportion as their manner of conducting

their efforts is regulated by this new and just view of the subject, they are pursued with new prospects, and new indications of success. A new era is thus actually commenced. Preparatory measures are thought necessary, where the gospel is to be offered. Efforts are directed more to the education of the young, than to the conversion of adults. Schools are established. Useful arts, and better habits and customs are introduced. And instead of offering the doctrines of the gospel first and alone, they are preceded or accompanied with all the improvements of christian countries in government and education, with the pure morality of the gospel, and with christian institutions. Thus under the influence of a good education, conducted with little or no *direct* reference to christianity, a certain portion of the generation, that is now coming into life, may be prepared to renounce, as they arrive at mature life, the polytheism and idolatry of their country, and add the christian faith and profession to the christian morals, in which they have been educated. The salutary influences of this change in the course pursued, are already beginning to appear in several parts of the Eastern world. Of this we can entertain no doubt, after making all due deductions for the exaggerations of honest enthusiasm in the accounts which come to us. The schools for educating the children of the natives of India in European learning cannot fail to produce an immense change in the character of the next generation. Those seminaries must be continually pouring out, to mingle with the mass of the population, and infuse a new character into it, large numbers of youth, imbued with knowledge, which will prepare them for

renouncing the superstitions of their fathers, and for receiving a purer doctrine and a more reasonable faith ; and which will give them a commanding influence in the community, and gradually, and in no great length of time, effect an important change in the religious and moral state of the country.

In view of this state of things, there seems to me to be reasonable ground of encouragement for christians to engage in earnest endeavours to send the blessings of the gospel to the heathen. And to no denomination of christians is the encouragement so strong, as to those, who maintaining the strict personal unity of God, have not to encounter, together with other obstacles, the objection so constantly urged against christianity by intelligent heathen, that the fundamental doctrine of our religion is neither more intelligible, nor more rational, than the polytheism, which they are called upon to renounce.

There is, besides, as relates to an important portion of the heathen world, another ground of encouragement, wholly peculiar to Unitarian christians, and peculiar to the present time. I refer to the question, which has for some time past been agitated with deep interest by the learned among the natives of India, relative to what was originally the fundamental doctrine of their religion. There exists accordingly, at this time, among the most enlightened natives of India, what is not usual, a spirit of inquiry on the subject of religion ; and a spirit of inquiry is always and every where, favourable to christian truth. This spirit has been stirred up, and has received the direction which it has now taken, by one of the most extraordinary men, that the age has produced. This wonderful

man is Rammohun Roy. He has appeared as a great reformer. He has attacked the popular polytheism of his country, and is endeavouring to abolish some of its shocking institutions and customs. He has besides studied the Jewish and christian scriptures,—has acquired a thorough and critical knowledge of them, and a wide extent of learning intimately connected with them; and has expressed his high admiration of the doctrine of the gospel, and its precepts. By the great powers of his mind, his extensive and accurate learning, and the excellence of his character, he is qualified to exert, and is now exerting, a great and salutary influence over the most intelligent of his countrymen, in favour of the pure doctrines of uncorrupted religion.

Several of his learned countrymen have adopted his views respecting the unity of God, and the nature of true religion; and are uniting their labours with his, in the great work of reformation. Whether it be from a conviction of the truth and divine origin of christianity, or only from a perception of its excellence, and its superiority to any other religion that has been offered to them; whichever be their motive, they are ready to lend all the aid in their power to favour its introduction among their countrymen. And it is christianity, as it is held by Unitarians, that they regard as so great a blessing, and which receives their support. These circumstances offer encouragements, and hopes, and inducements to missionary efforts, such as have never before been presented. Prospects entirely new are opened. The business is already begun for us. Heretofore, and *even now*, with respect to all other denominations of christians, the missionary has

all the higher classes of society opposed to him, and can usually have access to the minds only of the lowest and most ignorant part of the population ; and if a few converts are made from among these, their example will have but little influence, and what little it has will be rather unfavourable to the cause. But in the case of the distinguished Hindoo just mentioned, and his coadjutors, we have the first talents and learning in the nation, and men of the highest standing and character, co-operating with us, and aiding the cause by all the influence, which they can exert over their countrymen by their writings, and by their example. When such an impression is made for us, and such an influence exerted, can we regard it as any thing less, than a distinct indication of heaven what is our duty ? Can we doubt whether we are called upon to co-operate in the great and glorious work of emancipating millions from the thralldom of superstition, and opening their eyes to the light of true religion ?—Would it not be cause of deep regret to us hereafter, were the work to be achieved without us, while we were looking on only as idle spectators ; or were the glorious opportunity offered us by Providence, for want of the aid, which it was in our power to give, to be lost for ever ?

Another circumstance of present promise and encouragement, such as can seldom be expected to recur, is closely connected with that, which has just been noticed. There is already on the spot at Calcutta, a man* of distinguished talents, of competent learning, of unblemished character, and of hearty zeal in the cause ; who has been engaged for several years, in conjunction

* Rev. Mr Adam.

with the great religious philosopher before mentioned, in promoting the cause of christianity in its pure and simple form. These able and intrepid reformers, who have done so much, unaided and alone, and amidst opposition both from heathen and christian prejudice, to awaken public attention and to give a direction to the spirit of inquiry, it is believed to be now in our power to encourage by our sympathy, by our approbation, and by expressing a feeling of interest in their labours and their success ; and to aid by such contributions, as we may be able to send them, to enable them to proceed in the work, and bring it to a happy issue.

When I thus speak of contributions, you will not suppose me to mean, that the clergy should themselves be expected to furnish, from their very limited resources, contributions adequate to such a purpose. Of silver and gold, I well know, they can usually contribute but little. That little, however, they are bound by the strongest obligations to contribute, both as a personal duty, and as an example to others. But it is in their power to awaken an interest on the subject in the public mind, to exert an influence, to remove prejudices and misconceptions, to draw the attention of those to it, who have the means and the disposition to contribute largely, as soon as satisfactory reasons for doing it are offered ; and to devise the best means for accomplishing the great purpose.

It is desirable, that the experiment should be fairly made, whether our religion can be more readily introduced into heathen countries, in the form in which it is held by us, than in those forms, in which it has usually been offered ; and whether it can be made more easily to de-

scend from the higher to the lower, than to ascend from the lower to the higher classes in the community. This experiment I think will now be faithfully made, whether we, the ministers of religion, shall give it our countenance, and aid its prosecution, or not. The reasons for believing this are, as I have before stated, that among the natives in India there is a small, but highly respectable, body of monotheists; and among the European inhabitants, of Unitarian christians, who are united together in earnest endeavors to reform the religion of the country. Unitarian christians in England also seem fully sensible of the value and importance of these indications of a great incipient revolution in the minds of men in India on the subject of religion, and are taking spirited and well concerted measures to promote it, and to give it a right direction. And in this country, whatever may be the course, which we shall pursue, there are individuals, who are so deeply impressed with the value of the opportunity now offered, and with the duty of seizing the occasion, that they will not suffer the experiment to fail for want of the efforts requisite on their part to give it success.

In view of these circumstances, it is for us now to say, whether we will be the last to listen to the appeal, which is so distinctly made to us by the providence of God; the last to manifest a lively interest in spreading abroad the truths of our holy religion, and to aid in extending its blessings to all, who are willing to receive them.

Should success, equal to our hopes, attend the present efforts to convert the natives of India to the christian faith, and the worship of one God, the doubts so long

resting on the minds of many, as to the efficacy of any human means for the conversion of the heathen, will be removed ; and christians will no longer be discouraged from attempts to impart the blessings of the gospel to other heathen nations, as they have before been, by the apprehended hopelessness of the case. The work will go on, the agents in it gathering strength, and courage, and experience as they proceed. Success in one point will animate to new exertions in other directions. The pious and benevolent will be inspired with new hopes and new energy ; and every additional example of an individual or of a people receiving the christian faith, will supply new motives and new courage for engaging in the holy work.

In this, as in every other enterprise, in which religion is the main and direct concern ; whether it be to purify it, to advance its interests, or to extend the knowledge of it, it is justly demanded of those, who are its appointed teachers, to lead the way, and to stand in the first rank of labour, of sacrifice, and of danger. But, in the present state of things, there is little room to speak of labours, or dangers, or sacrifices. None are required of you, that are worthy of being named. All that is now demanded is, that we lay aside all prepossessions adverse to the cause, if such have before been entertained, and laying open our minds to conviction and our hearts to impression, we give our attention to the subject in all its circumstances, and in all the evidence, in which it is now, by numerous publications, brought before the community. When this has been done, it must be left, and it may be safely left for each one to judge, according to the degree of conviction,

which has been produced, in what manner, to what degree, and by what means, it is his duty to aid the cause. Here then I rest the appeal, and I rest it with entire confidence and satisfaction.

But the time may not be distant—I hope it is not; when more will be required of us, than is required at present; when there will be a call, not only for sympathy and encouragement to those, who are already engaged in the work, but for fellow labourers to join them in it. And I trust that when that time shall come, it will find us prepared for the exigencies of it. I trust, that whenever in the judgment of those, who take a deep interest in the subject, and have the best information upon it, there shall be a demand for able, pious, learned, and intrepid men to devote their lives to the service, such men will be found, ready to go forth, wherever duty shall call them, and to do and to suffer whatever the holy cause, to which they devote themselves, shall require.



